

1

Writing in College

CREATE

PURPOSE	AUDIENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is/was the text meant to accomplish? Is that purpose explicit or implied?• What possibilities are there for creating a text that could meet that purpose?• Are there specific expectations the text must meet to achieve its intended purpose? If so, what are they?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the audience for this piece of writing? Is there more than one audience? If so, are their interests similar or competing?• What does the audience expect in terms of content, language use, tone, style, format, and delivery method?• If expectations are not met, what is the impact on the audience?
VOICE	MEDIUM
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What unique perspective does the author bring to this piece of writing? How is that unique perspective communicated?• How explicitly should the author make reference to his or her perspective? Should the author use <i>I</i>, and if so, when and why?• What is the author's tone in the piece of writing? For example, is it playful, serious, accusing, encouraging, hopeful, factual? What effect does that tone have on the piece of writing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How could the writing be delivered to its intended audience to meet its purpose (for example, as a printed essay, Web site, newspaper article, academic journal article, or <i>YouTube</i> video)?• What formatting rules should the text follow in that medium?• What would the impact be of delivering the text in another medium?

1 The Writing Process in Context

Starting on a writing project can be hard if you think of a piece of writing only as a permanent document that others will judge. In fact, the activities of writing overlap and recur; the writer loops back, revisits, rethinks, reconsiders, and refines. A writer (you!) continually revisits the steps of the process, adjusting and improving all along the way. Always remember, writing is a process of creation that involves planning, prewriting, drafting, reading, revising, editing, proofreading, and presenting (not necessarily in linear order)—all guided by critical thinking.

As you get started on a writing project, remember that writing is a conversation. When you write, you write for someone. With some writing tasks, you write only for yourself, and other times you write for another individual (for example, a teacher, a supervisor, a friend) or for a group of people (such as a class, a work group, an admissions committee). How and what you write are influenced by your purpose in writing, by your knowledge, by your reading and thinking about a subject, and by the expectations of the audience for which you are writing.

1a Your purpose

Ask yourself: What is my main purpose for writing in a particular situation? Here are some possibilities that are common in academic writing:

- explain an idea or theory or explore a question (expository writing)
- analyze the structure or content of a text (analytical writing)
- report on a process, an experiment, or lab results (technical or scientific writing)
- provide a status update on a project at work (business writing)
- persuade readers to understand your point of view, change their minds, or take action (persuasive or argumentative writing)
- record and reflect on your own experiences and feelings (expressive writing)
- tell a story (narrative writing)

The purpose of your writing will determine your options for presenting your final text.

1b Your audience

A good writer keeps readers in mind at all times. Achieving this connection, however, often proves challenging because not all readers have the same characteristics. Readers come from different regions, communities, ethnic groups, organizations, and academic disciplines, all with their own linguistic and rhetorical conventions. This means that you as a writer have several shifting selves, depending on your audience. In other words, you write differently when you text a friend, post on *Instagram*, write an essay for a college instructor, or apply for a grant, an internship, or a job.

1c Your voice

Your voice in writing is the way you come across to readers. What impression do you want them to form of you as a person—of your values and opinions? One of the first considerations is whether you want to draw attention to your opinions as the writer by using the first person pronoun *I* or whether you want to use the more neutral approach of keeping that *I* at a distance. Many academic disciplines have specific expectations for when and how to use *I*. It is always useful to consult your instructor when you are unsure.

Regardless of whether or not you use the word *I* in a particular piece of writing, beware of the leaden effect of using *I*-avoiding phrases such as “it would seem” or “it is to be expected that” and of overusing the pronoun *one*. William Zinsser in *On Writing Well* points out that “good writers are visible just behind their words,” conveying as they write “a sense of *I*-ness.” He advises at least thinking of *I* as you write your first draft, maybe even writing it and then editing it out later.

1d Your use of media

What are you working toward? a print document? a document with embedded images or other media? a multimedia presentation? an online document with hyperlinks, images, sound, or video? As you work through the process of choosing and developing a topic for a defined purpose

and audience, consider simultaneously the communication means that are available to you, especially if you are presenting your work online or with the help of presentation software. Always bear in mind how you can enhance your ideas with the design of your document and the use of images, graphs, or multimedia tools.



KEY POINTS

Making Work Accessible

As you choose media, consider how to make your work accessible for all of your readers:

- Consider whether readers have reliable high-speed connections before you post large image files online.
- Increase type size, provide a Zoom function, and either limit the number of visuals or describe them in words for readers with visual impairment. Colors with high contrast work better for some viewers.
- Use sites such as *AChecker*, *WAVE*, or *Webagogo* to test your documents for accessibility.

1e Revising and editing

In your everyday communications with friends and family using *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and such, you may be used to writing often and writing fast. In the academic and business worlds, almost everything is drafted, circulated, and revised. Revising is a common practice for a good reason. A first draft gives you a road map of what to do next, but it is not a polished work that you can hand in as a final version. You need to build in time for analyzing and reworking a draft, using your own thoughts on how to improve the draft, as well as getting feedback from other readers. After you have improved the ideas, flow, logic, clarity, and completeness, you can then do another reading specifically to check that the sentences, grammar, and punctuation are accurate and graceful. Chapters 12–37 will help you revise and edit your papers to free them of the glitches or errors that may annoy readers.

As you probably know, a certain type of language—called Standard Academic English—is preferred by academic audiences. It is vastly different from the language

used in informal writing. It avoids slang and abbreviations and adheres to a largely agreed-upon set of conventions for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and style. Yes, times change, and language changes. Disputes do inevitably arise, such as over the use of *who* or *whom*, *they* or *he* or *she*. Still, there exists enough agreement over what is “correct” for this preferred language to be labeled “standard.”

You may wonder who sets this standard. No one person, committee, or professional organization determines it. Rather, Standard Academic English is a set of conventions used by educated speakers and writers. Despite some local variations, areas of dispute, and shifts over time, Standard Academic English remains politically and sociologically branded as the language of those in power. No matter how insightful and original your ideas may be, readers will soon become impatient if those ideas are not expressed in language that follows the conventions of Standard Academic English. Readers who keep coming across what they see as errors in words and sentences may simply dismiss your writing. Rather than charitably overlooking grammatical problems and sentence snarls, they will perceive you, the writer, as careless or simply not aware of what readers expect. Using the version of Standard Academic English presented in this book, along with the editing guide in 33b, will help you avoid being perceived in this way.

2 A Framework for Critical Thinking

Texts in academic, personal, and professional settings all have contexts that influence how we interpret, respond to, use, or ignore them. Understanding that context, both when reading and when writing, is a key to critical thinking. The word *critical* is not negative and does not indicate that you are finding fault with something. Instead, *critical thinking* refers to the careful, reflective consideration that writers give to a text when they are reading closely and writing deliberately. In this sense, the ability to understand the context of a piece of writing (either one you are reading or one you are writing) and to consider the ways the purpose, audience, voice, and medium shape the text is a key component of critical thinking.


KEY POINTS
A Framework for Critical Thinking

As you read and write, especially for academic purposes, you may find the following framework useful for critically considering the relationship between context and writing:

PURPOSE	AUDIENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is/was the text meant to accomplish? Is that purpose explicit or implied? • What possibilities are there for creating a text that could meet that purpose? • Are there specific expectations the text must meet to achieve its intended purpose? If so, what are they? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the audience for this piece of writing? Is there more than one audience? If so, are their interests similar or competing? • What does the audience expect in terms of content, language use, tone, style, format, and delivery method? • If expectations are not met, what is the impact on the audience?
VOICE	MEDIUM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What unique perspective does the author bring to this piece of writing? How is that unique perspective communicated? • How explicitly should the author make reference to his or her perspective? Should the author use <i>I</i>, and if so, when and why? • What is the author's tone in the piece of writing? For example, is it playful, serious, accusing, encouraging, hopeful, factual? What effect does that tone have on the piece of writing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could the writing be delivered to its intended audience to meet its purpose (for example, as a printed essay, Web site, newspaper article, academic journal article, or <i>YouTube</i> video)? • What formatting rules should the text follow in that medium? • How can the text be made most accessible to the intended audience? • What would the impact be of delivering the text in another medium?

© 2018 Cengage Learning®

You can use these questions as a guide for understanding and interpreting the text you are reading. When you write, you can use these questions to help you make decisions at important points in the writing process. These questions can be useful for writing that you do in many contexts, including professional settings and college courses.


KEY EXAMPLE
Critical Reading

While reading the following passage about the effects of drinking milk on children and young adults, a student annotates the passage as she reads it, considering different elements of context. The passage is from an article in the academic journal *Pediatrics*. Her comments, questions, and challenges establish her role in the conversation.

Article in an academic journal (medium), so this piece will reach other doctors

Writing to doctors in a pediatrics journal, so they're drawing on research from other respected sources (audience)

Is there some way the government benefits? Uh-oh. This looks suspicious.

Authors don't insert their own opinion but report what others have said (voice)

Look up _____

So, is drinking milk harmful to me? Or is there just no evidence that it's necessary?

This looks like it will be the purpose of the article

Over the past 20 years, the National Institutes of Health, the National Academy of Sciences, and the US Department of Agriculture have made recommendations for calcium intake for children and adults for the intended purpose of osteoporosis prevention. Recommended intakes have escalated gradually, and dairy products have been promoted often in federal nutrition policy documents as a "preferred" calcium source.

However, because the level of dairy product consumption in the United States is among the highest in the world, accounting for 72% of dietary calcium intake, and osteoporosis and fracture rates are simultaneously high, numerous researchers have called into question the effectiveness of nutrition policies aimed at osteoporosis prevention through dairy consumption. Findings from recent epidemiologic and prospective studies in women, children, and adolescents also have raised questions about the efficacy of the use of dairy products and other calcium-containing foods for the promotion of bone health.

—Amy Joy Lanou, Susan E. Berkow, and Neal D. Barnard, "Calcium, Dairy Products, and Bone Health in Children and Young Adults: A Reevaluation of the Evidence"

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the strategies you have used in the past to annotate texts. Which of these strategies were useful?
2. What new strategies might you try the next time you are asked to read something carefully and critically?